TRUE LIES:
MEMES AS IRONIC DISAVOWAL
AND POST-IRONIC CATHARSIS

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Digital Media Research
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“ONLY PRISONERS HAVE TIME TO READ, AND IF YOU WANT TO ENGAGE IN A TWENTY-YEAR LONG RESEARCH PROJECT FUNDED BY THE STATE, YOU WILL HAVE TO KILL SOMEONE.”

Mark Fisher
My therapist calling his therapist the second I leave his office.

Masturbating getting so high I can't move or talk

Telling my friends I miss them

Listening to the same 3 albums from the 2000s

Watching dumb shit on YouTube

I can't even. Why is this happening?

Fax don't care about your feelings.

It protecc

It create completely random panic attack

And it's a V

But most importantly it suffers from constant dopamine lack
A conversation about design as a cultural practice—a discussion of the role of culture in society and the role of design in culture

It is about questioning the way we construct identity in an age of postmodern ambivalence and late capitalist apathy
The role of **culture** in **society**
The role of **memes** in **culture** today
The semiotic **design** of memes
The role of irony and post-irony in memes regarding our participation in late capitalism
theory is my praxis

empirically sound, scrupulously sourced, carefully formulated hypotheses

wild conjectures and fanciful self-serving abstractions I dreamt up while high af
“THE MEME IS A UNIT OF CULTURAL INFORMATION THAT SPREADS BY IMITATION”

Richard Dawkins
THE DAWKINS SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

Memes are **ideas** or pieces of information that reside **in the brain**.

Not simple **ideas** like red, round, or cold, but **complex ones** like the alphabet, chess, or impressionism.

Passed along via vehicles: **images, texts, artefacts, or rituals**.
THE IMAGE MACRO

90s kids entering their 30s:
“I DEFINE AN INTERNET MEME AS:
A A GROUP OF DIGITAL ITEMS SHARING COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTENT, FORM, AND OR STANCE, WHICH
B WERE CREATED WITH AWARENESS OF EACH OTHER AND c WERE CIRCULATED, IMITATED, AND/OR TRANSFORMED VIA THE INTERNET BY MANY USERS.”

Limor Shifman
DISTRACTED BOYFRIEND MEME
The Afterschool Special

Vol. 3

me

this boring
overused
meme format

subverting
the meme's
typical usage
more interesting memes

this fucking meme again
SO GLAD I GREW UP

DOING THIS  NOT THIS
You told us that you didn’t like disposable plastic drinking straws.

We recorded it.

And added a bunch of cool effects in Ableton Live. It sounds pretty sick to be honest.
People Think I Hate Millennials, But Really I Just Hate My Son, Brian
DO PANIC ATTACKS COUNT AS CARDIO?
We have something to tell you
it's not just make-up

MY TARGET: YOUR DAD

IT'S WAR PAINT

MY OBJECTIVE: ACQUIRE HIS VAST RESOURCES

TO WHAT END?

well, to purchase klonopin on the dark web, of course
He remembered your birthday when no one else did.
Did someone say something uncomfortably heavy? Not sure how to respond? Looking for a simple combination of letters to express your concern while not having to put the effort into an actual response?

Try Saying “oof”
whatever the fuck I'm doing
You told us that you didn’t like disposable plastic drinking straws.

We recorded it.

And added a bunch of cool effects in Ableton Live. It sounds pretty sick to be honest.

DO PANIC ATTACK COUNT AS CARDIO?

SO GLAD I GET THERAPY

therapy

Whatever the fuck I’m doing

The Afterschool Special

Vol. 3
IRONY VS. POST-IRONY

IRONY

Ironic consists of purporting a meaning of an utterance or a situation that is different, often opposite, to the literal one.

POST-IRONY.

The ironising opposition of what is meant against the usual meaning of what is said is undermined. With this there is a short-circuiting of the position of knowing where one stands in relation to the ironic displacement.
POST-IRONY

as a cultural phenomenon
PRAGMASEMIOTICS

The theoretical study of how people make use of combinations of signs organised along certain rules and principles to create meaning.
COMMUNICATIONAL LEVELS

Level 1 (L1)  Context.  an empirical communication process between a real author and a real reader

Level 2 (L2)  Text.  a combination of a syntactic and visual signs

Level 3 (L3)  Enunciation.  a *fictional* situation of enunciation in which a subject produces the contents of a story

Level 4 (L4)  Enounced.  the story that is produced
Tired of looking at BAD SCREEN

Can’t wait to get home and look at GOOD SCREEN
The Afterschool Special

Vol. 3

Context.

(L1) implied by (L2)

Text.

(L2) a fictive voice

Enunciation.

(L3) implied by (L2)

(L4) the story told

BATCH SCREEN

Can't wait to get home and look at GOOD SCREEN
IRONY

$L_1 > L_2$

$L_2 < L_3$

$L_4 = \text{ironic}$
SO GLAD I GREW UP

DOING THIS

NOT THIS
The Afterschool Special

Vol. 3

Context.

(L1) implies (L2)

Text.

(L2) implies (L3)

Enunciation.

a fictive voice

(L3) implies (L4)

Enounced.

the story implied by L3
POST-IRONY

$L_1 > L_2$
$L_2 \ggg L_3$
$L_4 = \text{post-ironic}$
IRONY.

$L_1 > L_2$

$L_2 < L_3$

$L_4 = \text{ironic}$

POST-IRONY.

$L_1 > L_2$

$L_2 <<<>>> L_3$

$L_4 = \text{post-ironic}$
The Afterschool Special

You told us that you didn't like disposable plastic drinking straws.

We recorded it.

And added a bunch of cool effects in Ableton Live. It sounds pretty sick to be honest.

DO PANIC ATTACKS COUNT AS CARDIO?

SO

DOING THIS

NOT THIS

therapy

whatever the fuck I'm doing

MY TARGET YOUR DAD

MY OBJECTIVE ACQUIRING GUNSFAST DEPARTMENT

TO WHAT END?

IT'S WAR PAINT

MY DAD'S GONE

HER JUST BLOWS IT

Just H

REMEMBERED YOUR B-DAY

WHEN NO ONE ELSE DID
“CYNICAL DISTANCE IS JUST ONE WAY....TO BLIND OURSELVES TO THE STRUCTURAL POWER OF IDEOLOGICAL FANTASY: EVEN IF WE DO NOT TAKE THINGS SERIOUSLY, EVEN IF WE KEEP AN IRONICAL DISTANCE, WE ARE STILL DOING THEM.”

Slavoj Žižek
“CAPITALISM IN GENERAL RELIES ON THIS STRUCTURE OF DISAVOWAL. WE BELIEVE THAT MONEY IS ONLY A MEANINGLESS TOKEN OF NO INTRINSIC WORTH, YET WE ACT AS IF IT HAS A HOLY VALUE. MOREOVER, THIS BEHAVIOUR PRECISELY DEPENDS UPON THE PRIOR DISAVOWAL — WE ARE ABLE TO FETISHISE MONEY IN OUR ACTIONS ONLY BECAUSE WE HAVE ALREADY TAKEN AN IRONIC DISTANCE TOWARDS MONEY IN OUR HEADS”

Mark Fisher
me: capitalism is gross
money: *presents itself*
me:
LOL!

thank god for irony

ironically overworking

ironically buying more stuff

ironically competing with friends

ironically crying in private

ironically burning out